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A more complex notion
of architectural functional beauty

Abstract
The objectives of this article are to consider the architectural application of Parsons and Carlson's notion of functional beauty and to propose a possible deepening of it which may help us answer questions on the possible comparisons between equally functionally beautiful architectures and, consequently, on the current debate on the most recent museums.

Keywords
Aesthetics of architecture, Functional beauty, Parsons and Carlson

The objectives of this article are to consider the architectural application of Parsons and Carlson's notion of functional beauty and to propose a possible deepening of it.

Parsons and Carlson developed their notion of functional beauty in their homonymous monograph published in 2008[2] and focused on its architectural application in the chapter *Architecture and the Built Environment*. Their notion of functional beauty is founded on the notion of proper function, which is developed starting from Preston's definition[3]: "X has a *proper function* F if and only if Xs currently exist because, in the recent past, ancestors of X were successful in meeting some need or want in the marketplace because they performed F, leading to manufacture and distribution, or preservation, of Xs" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 148). According to Parsons and Carlson, the knowledge of the proper function of X founds its aesthetic appreciation as functionally beautiful: "our central concept is, really, aesthetic

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[2] See the paperback edition G. Parsons, A. Carlson, *Functional beauty*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2012.

[3] See B. Preston, *Why is a wing like a spoon? A pluralist theory of function*, "Journal of Philosophy", n. 115 (1998), pp. 215-54.

appreciation involving knowledge that concerns function" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: XII). As for architecture, "the proper function of a building will be the thing done by such buildings that, in the recent past, has led them to pass muster in the marketplace and thereby be manufactured and distributed" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 146), and buildings "are functionally beautiful where their perceptual appearances are altered by our knowledge of their function" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 160). We may say, for instance, that the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan is functionally beautiful since its aesthetic features are somehow consistent with the proper function, of which we have knowledge, of a basilica, and which is facilitating the expression of a human being's religious dimension.

Parsons and Carlson's notion of functional beauty is promising for important reasons, starting from its capacity of overcoming aesthetic relativism: "the core idea behind a proper function is that of a function belonging to the object itself, as opposed to being imposed upon it by use, context, or happenstance" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 83). For instance, the reason why the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan is functionally beautiful lies in itself, namely, in the relationship between its aesthetic features and its proper function, which "emerges from, and is a recognition of, our collective treatment of artefacts over time" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 146), and not in contingent use, or context, or happenstance, or even intention, since "the intentions of individuals, including designers, are not sufficient to bestow a proper function on an artefact. Rather, in order for a particular effect to become the proper function of an artefact, this effect must meet with success in the marketplace, and be selected as a result. In looking for the functions of particular buildings or structures, then, we are directed not to the idealized plans of designers or architects, but to the mass use of similar structures over time" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 145-6). Interestingly enough, according to Parsons and Carlson, time is an important tool to understand the proper function of an object. We may say that time can help us overcome forms of extreme subjectivism, namely, of relativism, when we are aesthetically judging an object, since a shared judgment over time means that, if we say, for instance, that the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan is functionally beautiful, then, even if we cannot take it as an objective judgment, we can take it as an intersubjective judgment – and an intersubjective judgment suffices to make us do several important things, from deciding to preserve the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan (and to use a

huge amount of money to do that) to deciding to build other basilicas to facilitate the expression of a human being's religious dimension (and, again, to use a huge amount of money to do that).

But what if we ask ourselves whether to decide to use a huge amount of money to preserve the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan or the Duomo in Milan on the basis of their functional beauties? Namely, what if we ask ourselves what religious architecture is more functionally beautiful? Parsons and Carlson do not seem to help us answer this sort of question, which may be, indeed, practically crucial anytime we have to decide, as architects, politicians, philosophers or whatever, what to preserve and what not to preserve, what to build and what not to build, especially when we use public money. We may ask Parsons and Carlson: "We agree that both the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan and the Duomo in Milan are functionally beautiful. If we have the possibility of paying for the preservation of the former or of the latter on the basis of their functional beauties, then what religious architecture should we preserve? Moreover, if we have the possibility of paying for building a new museum in Milan, and we have do decide what new museum to build on the basis of the functional beauties of two very different projects, then what new museum should we build?". Indeed, it is exceedingly complicated to aesthetically judge architectures which are not built, namely, which we cannot experience, but this is what continuously happens in our lives as architects, politicians, philosophers or whatever, and we should try to find a possible answer. Parsons and Carlson's impressive work on their promising notion of functional beauty does not seem to help us answer this sort of question, since they focus on their notion of functional beauty "absolutely", and not "comparatively". If we say that "X has a *proper function* F if and only if Xs currently exist because, in the recent past, ancestors of X were successful in meeting some need or want in the marketplace because they performed F, leading to manufacture and distribution, or preservation, of Xs", and that Xs "are functionally beautiful where their perceptual appearances are altered by our knowledge of their function", then we cannot answer our crucial questions, since we can say that both the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio and the Duomo are functionally beautiful, but we cannot say what is more functionally beautiful (and, thus, what to preserve), and we can say that both the first museum and the second museum may be functionally beautiful, but we cannot say what may be more functionally beautiful (and, thus, what to build). Namely, we face a sort of

question which the notion of functional beauty does not seem to answer: how can our aesthetic judgments help us choose among different possibilities? Of course, we are helped by other sorts of reasons, namely, by non-aesthetic reasons. For instance, we may be helped, in the first case, by a practical reason (among others), according to which the Duomo can contain the congregation of the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, but the latter cannot contain the congregation of the former, and, in the second case, by an economic reason (among others), according to which the first museum is cheaper than the second museum. But, again, how can our aesthetic judgments help us choose, once we agree that both the Duomo and the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio are functionally beautiful and both the first museum and the second museum may be functionally beautiful?

Trying to answer this sort of question may mean showing that our aesthetic judgments on architectural beauty should be founded on a more complex notion of functional beauty: a notion which partly includes Parsons and Carlson's notion of functional beauty, as their impressive work persuades, but partly includes something else, as I will try to show.

When I ask my students (who are architects-to-be, and know that function is exceedingly important to architectural beauty) whether they judge more beautiful a Doric temple or an Ionic temple, they always answer that they think that the latter is more beautiful than the former. And when I ask them whether they judge more beautiful the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio or the Duomo, they always answer that they think that the former is more beautiful than the latter. Of course, it is not easy to explain why. According to the notion of functional beauty, for instance, we have equally good reasons to say that they are all functionally beautiful. But, again, what if we need to compare architectures which have equally good reasons to be judged functionally beautiful? Let us try to reason on the first example. We may say that the Doric temple and the Ionic temple differ, especially, since the latter is characterised by columns which are supported by bases (whereas the columns of the former are not supported by bases), by taller columns (whereas the columns of the former are smaller) and by more decorated capitals, with volutes (whereas the capitals of the former are less decorated, without volutes). We could think that judging the Ionic temple more beautiful than the Doric temple means founding our judgment on something that Kant would have considered totally subjective (for instance, on our totally subjec-

tive, and even idiosyncratic, attraction to decorations). But I think that we would be wrong – I think that judging the Ionic temple more beautiful than the Doric temple means founding our judgment on a notion of functional beauty: on a more complex notion of functional beauty. If it is true that the proper function of the temple is facilitating the expression of a human being's religious dimension (according to the pagan religion), then we may argue that the three differences highlighted between the Doric temple and the Ionic temple are exceedingly meaningful in terms of aesthetically representing this proper function: columns which are supported by bases and are taller can more powerfully represent the religious dimension in general, in terms of tending from the earth (from immanence) to the sky (to transcendence), and more decorated capitals can more powerfully represent the religious human being in particular, in terms of having aspirations (which may be represented by architectural elements we may call superfluous) in addition to needs (which may be represented by architectural elements we may call necessary). Indeed, we may argue that the Ionic temple is more beautiful than the Doric temple and, moreover, that the former is more functionally beautiful than the latter if we use a more complex notion of function, which includes what architecture seems to be always for – and architecture seems to be always for the human being, since the latter lives within the former: more precisely, for the human being's spatiotemporal identity, which is characterised by needs and aspirations, which a truly functionally beautiful architecture should always represent.

Now, let us try to reason on the second example, which can help clarify this argument. Of course, the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio and the Duomo, which are exceedingly complex architectures, equally exceedingly differ. If we try to simplify their differences, then we may say that they differ, especially, since the former is a Romanesque religious architecture and the latter is a Gothic religious architecture: the former is characterised by a four-sided portico (whereas the latter has no portico whatever, but an enormous square), by two bell towers (whereas the latter has no bell tower whatever, but several spires), by smaller dimensions (whereas the dimensions of the latter are bigger), by darker colours, thanks to the bricks (whereas the colours of the latter are lighter, thanks to the marble) and by a lower ceiling (whereas the ceiling of the latter is higher). If we try the idea according to which the functional beauty of an architecture should be deepened, since it is founded on the aesthetic power of representing

the human being's spatiotemporal identity, and according to which the functional beauty of a religious architecture is founded on the aesthetic power of representing the human being's religious dimension (in terms, for instance, of tending from the earth and immanence to the sky and transcendence and of having aspirations in addition to needs), then we could think that we should judge the Duomo more beautiful than the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio. But almost any Milanese would say that the latter is more beautiful than the former. Trying to understand why is instructive. The Duomo is surely characterised by architectural elements which powerfully represent the human being's religious dimension (thus, the proper function of facilitating its expression): the more impressive heights of the several spires, of the walls and of the ceiling, together with the lighter colours of the marble, can powerfully represent transcendence. But we may say that transcendence is too strongly represented: the heights and the colours represent transcendence more than the human being's tending from immanence to transcendence. Namely, the Duomo represents something divine more than something human, and, not by chance, is aesthetically characterised by a category we should call sublime more than beauty – the Duomo is less beautiful, and even less functionally beautiful, since it less powerfully represents the human being's spatiotemporal identity, which is outstandingly represented by the basilica of Sant'Ambrogio. Indeed, the latter is surely characterised by architectural elements which outstandingly represent the human being's religious dimension (thus, the proper function of facilitating its expression): the less impressive heights of the two bell towers, of the walls and of the ceiling, together with the darker colours of the bricks, can outstandingly represent the human being's tending from immanence to transcendence. Moreover, the representation of what is human, and not of what is divine (again, of the human being's tending to the divine), is strengthened by the four-sided portico, which is a beautiful, namely, a human-sized architectural space, which makes us feel included in what stands in front of us, namely, in a space thought for what is human (whereas the enormous square of the Duomo is a sublime, namely, a non-human-sized architectural space, which makes us feel excluded from what stands in front of us, namely, from a space thought for what is divine).

The examples of both the pagan religious architectures and the Christian religious architectures seem to show something that may

deepen Parsons and Carlson's notion of functional beauty, and make it useful for comparing different functionally beautiful architectures. What I am trying to argue is that, if we are judging architecture, then its proper function is always founded on the following first proper function: being the space for the human being's life – and, thus, representing the human being's life in terms of human spatiotemporal identity, namely, human needs and human aspirations, as I will try to show.

Thus, when we say that the architecture "X has a *proper function* F if and only if Xs currently exist because, in the recent past, ancestors of X were successful in meeting some need or want in the marketplace because they performed F, leading to manufacture and distribution, or preservation, of Xs", we should specify that the proper function of the architecture X is more, for instance, than a matter of facilitating the expression of a human being's religious dimension: indeed, it is a matter of facilitating the expression of a human being's religious dimension by aesthetically representing who a human being is – if there is no aesthetic representation of the human being's identity, then there is no functionally beautiful architecture at all. We may enter several religious architectures which surely facilitate the expression of a human being's religious dimension since we can find inside of them all the elements required for the religious services, but we may not judge them functionally beautiful at all. We may not even judge them beautiful at all. There is an essential difference to be highlighted between what is *functional* and what is *functionally beautiful*: when we enter such religious architectures we cannot say that they "are functionally beautiful where their perceptual appearances are altered by our knowledge of their function", since their perceptual appearances can be altered by our knowledge of their function even if we do not judge them functionally beautiful, but simply functional. *Beauty seems to require something more*. Let us make a simpler example. If I am in a room whose ceiling is inaccurately painted and, at the same time, perfectly protecting my head from the rain, then I can say that it is ugly and, at the same time, functional. I need something more to make the word "beautiful" enter my judgment: I need to be in a room whose ceiling is accurately painted and, at the same time, perfectly protecting my head from the rain – I need a ceiling which aesthetically represents that its proper function is that of perfectly protecting a human being, and not a cat, namely, a creature with aspirations (for instance, the aspiration of feeling protected by

something, and feeling protected by something requires attention to details) in addition to needs (for instance, the need of being protected by something, and being protected by something does not require attention to details). And what if I enter a second room whose ceiling is accurately covered by a sophisticated mosaic and, at the same time, perfectly protecting my head from the rain? I am likely to judge this ceiling more functionally beautiful than the ceiling which is accurately painted and, at the same time, perfectly protecting my head from the rain. And the reason why I am likely to judge this ceiling more functionally beautiful is that its sophistication is likely to more powerfully represent the human aspiration of feeling protected – its sophistication is likely to more powerfully represent who a human being is.

Parsons and Carlson's notion of functional beauty does not seem to suffice in terms of the representational, and even symbolic, power of beauty in general, and of architectural beauty in particular: once we have defined the proper function of an architecture X in terms of being "successful in meeting some need or want in the marketplace because they performed F, leading to manufacture and distribution, or preservation, of Xs", we need to define the reasons why, in the case of the equally functionally beautiful $X_{(1)}$ and $X_{(2)}$, we judge $X_{(1)}$ more functionally beautiful then $X_{(2)}$. I think that we should deepen the notion of architectural functional beauty by specifying that representing human spatiotemporal identity, namely, human needs and human aspirations, should always be thought of as the first proper function of any architecture – any architecture should, as its first proper function, represent who a human being is: who a human being is in terms of spatiality (for instance, by considering what a human body is, and the fact that a human being's vision is frontal, and not lateral), of temporality (for instance, by considering how a human body moves, and the fact that a human being's perceivable experience requires time), of needs (for instance, by considering that a human being wants windows as sources of air) and of aspirations (for instance, by considering that a human being wants windows as sources of freedom).

Now, let us go back to the case of the museum: if we have the possibility of paying for building a new museum in Milan, and we have do decide what new museum to build on the basis of the functional beauties of two very different projects, then what new museum should we build? The case of the museum seems quite compli-

cated, as the current debate on the most recent museums shows. I think that it is necessary to start from another example made by Parsons and Carlson and, then, to go back to the case of the museum. Parsons and Carlson write: "The American sculptor Horatio Greenough, for instance, lampoons the "Greek temple jammed in between the brick shops of Wall street or Cornhill, covered with lettered signs, and occupied by groups of money-changers and apple women". According to Greenough: "The pile stands a stranger among us, and receives a respect akin to what we should feel for a fellow-citizen in the garb of Greece. It is a make-believe. It is not the real thing. We see the marble capitals; we trace the acanthus leaves of a celebrated model – incredulous; it is not a temple". The official excuse for this wilful obfuscation of social reality, of course, was beauty. Greenough's critique suggests that, if beauty really entails such frumpery and such a wild distortion of reality, it were better to leave beauty behind" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 140)[4]. Parsons and Carlson's position is analogous: "Greenough's suggestion for a reorientation of architecture is similar to our own: that we follow the lead of nature and see the beauty of buildings as informed by, as emerging out of, their functions" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 140). Moreover, "there would be something undeniably ridiculous, if not defective, about a society that engaged in such a massive and pervasive form of self-deception. […] The same point holds, we think, for a society that "dresses" its buildings as things they are not: there is something ridiculous, if not defective, in denying or suppressing reality in such a dramatic and widespread manner. […] We spend much of our lives either in buildings or surrounded by them. Deceptiveness in architecture, consequently, is more pervasive and extreme than the deceptiveness of art, and, in fact, more pervasive and extreme than even the sartorial phoniness considered by Greenough would be. Avoiding this sort of deceptiveness in our aesthetic appreciation of buildings is indeed, therefore, a virtue of functional beauty" (Parsons and Carlson 2012: 142). Parsons and Carlson generalise a position which may be misleading when we judge architecture in general and the most recent museums in particular (and which, indeed, is analogous to the standard position against the most recent museums in particular), as I will try to show.

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[4] The quote is from H. Greenough, *American architecture*, in H.T. Tuckerman, *A memorial of Horatio Greenough*, New York, Benjamin Blom, 1968, p. 126.

Let us enter the current debate by making reference to a massively criticised museum: Libeskind's 2007 extension of the Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum, which is considered by Parsons in his article *Fact and function in architectural criticism*. Parsons defines Libeskind's extension "A dramatic structure composed of sloping walls that meet at sharp angles" (Parsons 2011: 21), and adds that "Critics of the design complained about a number of its features […]. But its lack of functionality was a particular target. ROM staff and patrons complained about the space's unsuitability for exhibitions, citing the absence of vertical walls. The *Washington Post*'s Philip Kennicott declared it a 'useless' building, writing that, despite its impressive appearance from the street, once inside, "you need a map to move around its irrational and baffling dead spaces". Another critic described it as 'an ill-conceived funhouse'" (Parsons 2011: 21)[5]. Parsons founds his judgment of Libeskind's extension on his notion of functional beauty: "the selected effect responsible for the building's original construction in 1912 – displaying collections of significant natural and cultural artefacts – may not be the reason that it continues to exist today" (Parsons 2011: 27), since "in recent times museums have survived by adapting, and this process of adaptation has turned them into something new" (Parsons 2011: 28), thus "the defenders of the ROM renovation have been correct, after all, about the proper function of the museum: it is a new agora" (Parsons 2011: 28). According to Parsons, Libeskind's extension, as it is considered a new agora, suitably fits the notion of functional beauty. Thus, Libeskind's new agora can be judged functionally beautiful.

Yet, judging Libeskind's new agora functionally beautiful does not seem satisfying to several critics, me included. I agree that we should judge this architecture a new agora. But I do not think that judging it a new agora is sufficient. Moreover, I do not think that judging it functionally beautiful is correct.

Let us start from the first point: I do not think that judging it a new agora is sufficient. Any architecture should be something specific inside and, at the same time, urban space (especially public urban space) as far as its exterior is concerned (for instance, the building of my flat should be my home and other homes inside and, at the same

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[5] The quotes are from P. Kennicott, *Architecture: best of the decade*, "Washington Post", December 27 (2009), E4 and I. Chodikoff, *Viewpoint*, "Canadian Architect", n. 52 (2007), p. 6.

time, public urban space as far as its exterior is concerned. More precisely, its exterior should be a distinguishing element of a neighbourhood which is distinguished by specific urban and architectural features, since the building is set at the intersection of two important roads, one of which is the Western entrance of the neighbourhood). Of course, the Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum should be able to do the same thing even better: it should be a museum inside and, at the same time, public urban space as far as its exterior is concerned. More precisely, its exterior should be a new agora. Even more precisely, we may say that its exterior should be a new icon for the city of Toronto (which happens in the case of several new museums which are equally characterised by eccentric exteriors). Thus, we may say that judging it functionally beautiful is not correct, since this judgment is intuitively and rationally false for several critics as far as its interior is concerned (it is not a functional museum inside) and intuitively false for several critics as far as its exterior is concerned (it is a functional new agora and a functional new icon for the city of Toronto outside. Yet, it does not seem satisfying to several critics. More precisely, it does not seem beautiful at all to several critics).

Trying to clarify the reason why the Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum is intuitively not functionally beautiful as far as its exterior is concerned means passing from the first point to the second point. I think that the reason why it does not seem beautiful at all to several critics is the following: indeed, it is not beautiful at all since it is sublime, or, better, it tries to be sublime – it is the sublime, and not the beautiful, the aesthetic category on the basis of which it should be judged. We may make reference to the sublime as it is classically defined by Kant, who distinguishes it from the beautiful: "The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in limitation; the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it, or at its instance, and yet it is also thought as a totality: so that the beautiful seems to be taken as the presentation of an indeterminate concept of the understanding, but the sublime as that of a similar concept of reason. Thus the satisfaction is connected in the first case with the representation of quality, but in this case with that of quantity" (Kant 2000: 5: 244). More precisely, Kant defines the mathematically sublime and the dynamically sublime. As for the former, "We call sublime that which is absolutely great" (Kant 2000: 5: 248). As for the latter, "Power is a capacity that is superior to great obstacles. The same thing is called domin-

ion if it is also superior to the resistance of something that itself possesses power. Nature considered in aesthetic judgment as a power that has no dominion over us is dynamically sublime" (Kant 2000: 5: 260). Of course, we should pass from the natural sublime conceivable in the eighteenth century to the possibility, at least, of the artefactual sublime conceivable in the twenty-first century. If we try this passage, then we may find the sublime in several architectures built in the new millennium as the new icons of several cities. For instance, if we consider Libeskind's 2007 extension of the Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum, then we may find that its "dramatic structure composed of sloping walls that meet at sharp angles", "its impressive appearance from the street" and the fact that, "once inside, 'you need a map to move around its irrational and baffling dead spaces'" can be judged sublime as a contemporary architectural try to overcome "the form of the object, which consists in limitation", and to get the "formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it". This passage from the limited (artefactual) form of the beautiful to the limitless (artefactual) form of the sublime has been quite systematically introduced by Lyotard in his *Lessons on the analytic of the sublime: Kant's Critique of judgment, §§ 23-29*, and should be considered by us anytime we have to do with contemporary architectures which try to be iconic precisely through forms which seem limitless sometimes because of eccentric compositions (where it is difficult to perceptively find the beginning and the end), sometimes because of gigantic compositions (where, again, it is difficult to perceptively find the beginning and the end) and sometimes because of both eccentricity and gigantism. Thus, the reason why I do not think that judging Libeskind's extension functionally beautiful is correct is that it is sublime, or, better, it tries to be sublime. More precisely, Libeskind's extension is not functionally beautiful at all (and not beautiful at all): it is quite an ugly museum inside (for instance, because of "the space's unsuitability for exhibitions", "the absence of vertical walls", its being "a 'useless' building" and the necessity of "a map to move around its irrational and baffling dead spaces" which seem "an ill-conceived funhouse") and it is a sublime icon, or, better, it tries to be a sublime icon, outside.

Yet, it is possible to be both a functionally beautiful museum inside and a sublime icon, or, better, to try to be a sublime icon, outside (moreover, to be a sublime icon which generates a functionally beautiful public urban space outside). For instance, both the French museum MUCEM (Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Mé-

diterranée) and the Belgian museum MAS (Museum aan de Stroom) seem promising candidates to be judged both functionally beautiful museums inside and sublime icons which generate a functionally beautiful public urban space outside.

The French museum, built in 2013, is dedicated to the Mediterranean culture as the result of the meeting of different cultures, together with their different societies. As far as its interior is concerned, it is conceived as a very flexible space for both permanent and temporary exhibitions, and for other services (offices, teaching rooms, children rooms, auditorium, bookshops and restaurants). As far as its exterior is concerned, it is conceived as a very extended structure between the city and the seaside: an articulated structure of ways seamlessly connects the pier J4, the new building (through a vertical way within its exterior walls), the elevated square, the footbridge over the water, the old building, namely, Fort Saint Jean, the theatre, the garden, the panoramic way on the walls, the old port and the old city of Marseille. The idea of limitlessness is given both by the articulated structure of seamlessly connecting ways and by the new building, whose exterior is characterised by quite an eccentric and gigantic form, being a monolith covered by a sort of shell made by a rough wood-textured concrete which makes even more luminous the white concrete inside. Thus, the French museum seems capable of being a sublime icon (indeed, it works as a symbol of Marseille in the new millennium) which generates a functionally beautiful public urban space outside (indeed, it works as a space for anyone in terms of its capacity of being lived by anyone, and, thus, of regenerating a neighbourhood, firstly, and a city, secondly).

The Belgian museum, built in 2011, is dedicated to Antwerp. As far as its interior is concerned, it is conceived as a very flexible space for both permanent and temporary exhibitions, and for other services (offices, archives, bookshops and restaurants). As far as its exterior is concerned, it is conceived as a very high tower which works as a landmark and connects the outside public urban space with the inside space: a way starts from the outside square and goes inside along a boulevard which connects all the floors of the building by generating a spiral way which is a hybrid space, being both a space for the exhibitions and a space for walking and contemplating the city from above (indeed, the opening hours of the museum and of the boulevard are different, those of the latter being more extended than those of the former). The idea of limitlessness is given by the vertical

extension of both the tower and the boulevard, which seamlessly connects what is outside with what is inside. Thus, the Belgian museum seems capable of being a sublime icon (indeed, it works as a symbol of Antwerp in the new millennium) which generates a functionally beautiful public urban space both outside and inside (indeed, it works as a space for anyone in terms of its capacity of being lived by anyone who is interested in visiting the exhibitions or in walking and contemplating the city from above).

Now, let us go back to Parsons and Carlson's position, according to which "there would be something undeniably ridiculous, if not defective, about a society that […] 'dresses' its buildings as things they are not […]. Avoiding this sort of deceptiveness in our aesthetic appreciation of buildings is indeed, therefore, a virtue of functional beauty". Both the French museum and the Belgian museum clearly show us that architecture is always both a matter of interior space and a matter of exterior space, namely, a matter of public urban space. Thus, we may be less strict than Parsons and Carlson when we aesthetically judge Wall street: inside, it is not something that has to do with spirituality at all, but, outside, it is public urban space, and, indeed, its aura can work as a sublime public urban space (the first time I visited Wall street its aura impressed me, almost representing an overindividual dimension which can have an interesting meaning: if it is true that it is the place where the financial interests converge from anywhere, then, at the same time, it is one of the places which are most capable of making anyone, from anywhere, converge towards itself. Thus, its aura may not be deceptive for two reasons: firstly, its exterior should be judged as a public urban space and, secondly, its being sublime, and even something characterised by a sort of spiritual aura, should be judge by considering its capacity of being, indeed, an overindividual place, namely, a place which is capable of making converge towards itself individuals from anywhere).

Our reasoning leads us to think that architecture requires more aesthetic categories: beauty in general, and functional beauty in particular, do not suffice. More precisely, one of the most important aesthetic categories required by several of the most recent architectures is the sublime, since it is capable of representing the overindividual dimension strengthened by the globalisation of the new millennium.

And, as for functional beauty applied to architecture, we should use a more complex notion of it for a reason which the examples of the two museums help show: architecture always seems a matter of

human measure, sometimes in terms of finding it for staying within its limits (in the case of the beautiful) and sometimes in terms of finding it for overcoming its limits (in the case of the sublime) – and human measure always seems a matter of representing who a human being essentially is (or is not as an individual, in the case of the sublime), which means representing a sort of grounding function added to Parsons and Carlson's proper function. Thus, we may judge both the French museum and the Belgian museum functionally beautiful inside, but, if we compare them, trying to choose the most functionally beautiful as a model for the Milanese museum we want to build, then we may say, for instance, that the former is more functionally beautiful than the latter for reasons which Parsons and Carlson's proper function does not seem to explain. We may say, for instance, that the lights of the former are more accurate than the lights of the latter for reasons which have to do with something more than properly functioning as museum lights: the lights of the former can properly function as museum lights and, in addition, as something capable of making a human being feel welcome, or more welcome (whereas the lights of the latter can properly function as museum lights and not, in addition, as something capable of making a human being feel welcome, or more welcome). Let us make a simpler example. When we want to buy a new flat and, again, are comparing different flats to find, and to choose, the one which will be our home, what makes us choose the one which will be our home is something more than functional beauty in terms of proper function: it is something that has to do with its capacity of representing our identity as human beings characterised both by needs (for instance, the need of having a home) and by aspirations (for instance, the aspiration of feeling at home) – and feeling at home requires details which are capable of representing who we are: architecture should always be capable of making us feel represented (and, if a first architecture makes us feel more represented than a second architecture, we are likely to judge the former more beautiful than the latter).

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